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Record: 1**Title:** Point: "One Nation Indivisible": Religion and the Pledge of Allegiance.**Authors:** Anderson, Tim**Source:** Points of View: Pledge of Allegiance; 2007, p2-2, 1p**Document Type:** Article**Subject Terms:** FLAGS -- United States
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PUBLIC institutions**Geographic Terms:** UNITED StatesReport Available**Abstract:** This article presents an argument on religion and the Pledge of Allegiance. The Pledge of Allegiance has created controversy over the years because of its reference to a nation "under God." Americans are free to practice the religion of their choice, but our Constitution requires a clear separation between religion and government. Public schools are government institutions, and therefore any attempt at inserting either specific or general references to religion is a violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The original text of the Pledge of Allegiance contained no reference to "God"; it was simply a patriotic vow. During the 1950s, in the midst of the Cold War climate of anticommunist hysteria, Christian groups pressured the government to add the reference in an attempt to define American ideology from that of the officially atheist Soviet Union. As the Constitution makes clear, this reference is a violation of the ideals on which this country was founded. Recent legal challenges to its continued inclusion in the Pledge of Allegiance now give the Supreme Court an opportunity to live up to its obligation to uphold the First Amendment. The appropriate place for worship is in church, not public schools.**Lexile:** 1290**Full Text Word Count:** 1704**ISBN:** 1-4298-1586-8**Accession Number:** 12460326**Database:** Points of View Reference Center**Point: "One Nation Indivisible": Religion and the Pledge of Allegiance****Thesis:** Public schools are government institutions, and therefore any attempt at inserting either specific or general references to religion is a violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.**Summary:** Americans are free to practice the religion of their choice, but our Constitution requires a clear separation between religion and government. Public schools are government institutions, and therefore any attempt at inserting either specific or general references to religion is a violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The original text of the Pledge of Allegiance contained no reference to "God"; it was simply a patriotic vow. During the 1950s, in the midst of the Cold War climate of anticommunist hysteria, Christian groups pressured the government to add the reference in an attempt to define American ideology from that of the officially atheist Soviet Union. As the Constitution makes clear, this reference is a violation of the ideals on which this country was founded. Recent legal challenges to its continued inclusion in the Pledge of Allegiance now give the Supreme Court an opportunity to live up to its obligation to uphold the First Amendment. The appropriate place for worship is in church, not public schools.**Introduction**

The Pledge of Allegiance has created controversy over the years because of its reference to a nation "under God." Americans are free to practice the religion of their choice, but our Constitution requires a clear separation between religion and government. Public schools are government institutions, and therefore any attempt at inserting either specific or general references to religion is a violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

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The First Amendment

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States guarantees the separation of church and state. This has been a guiding principle for our country since its independence. It separates our form of government from those governments throughout history that have used religion as a test of citizenship, or leaders that have claimed divine heritage.

History of the Pledge

The original text of the Pledge of Allegiance, as first written in 1892, reads as follows: "I pledge allegiance to my flag and the republic for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." The Pledge of Allegiance has been altered on a number of occasions over the years, the most significant alteration being the addition of the two words "under God" in 1954. Until then, the Pledge had remained, for over sixty years, a secular pledge of patriotism to the United States.

In the 1950s, Christian groups pressured Congress to alter the Pledge by adding the reference to "God." This was during the time of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, when communism was described as a threat to the values of freedom and democracy around the world. This "red scare" culminated in a virtual witch-hunt of perceived communist threats within the U.S. The nation experienced a great deal of domestic turmoil, where citizens were accused of participating in communist-inspired conspiracies, and forced to testify against others who had been secretly implicated. Blacklists were created that effectively destroyed the careers of those who refused to participate in this violation of civil liberties.

In this context, some influential groups felt religious affirmation would help define and protect the values of the U.S. versus the "godless communism" of the Soviet Union. After some congressional debate, the addition of "under God" was passed. Announcing the change, President Eisenhower stated: "From this day forward, the millions of our school children will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural schoolhouse, the dedication of our nation and our people to the almighty." His speech makes clear the First Amendment violation that this alteration constitutes. There was some degree of protest at the time, and in the years since; but so far, none have persuaded legal opinion to eliminate the reference.

Legal History

Supreme Court rulings have found that the First Amendment prohibits the government from promoting a specific religion, religion in general, or creating a state-sanctioned religion. Despite this, the Constitution is not hostile toward religion. In fact, it supports the possibility for the adherence to all religions by U.S. citizens, and acknowledges that the best way to do this is to refrain from interfering in people's private religious lives.

In the 1940s, the Supreme Court made an important decision in the case of *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*. The court affirmed that the government could not require individuals to swear allegiance, whether to a flag or a "nation under God." Unfortunately, the decision did not go far enough. It stated that citizens were not compelled to swear allegiance, although public schools could continue to recite the Pledge for those students who wished.

The court has so far found that the reference to "God" in the pledge is of a "ceremonial" nature, alluding to the historical traditions of this country, rather than an endorsement of religion. The court has avoided dealing with the appropriateness of religious references in public schools by stating that students are not compelled to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. However, even if some dissenting students do not recite the Pledge, the presence of "under God" is nonetheless a governmental endorsement of religion and thus violates the separation of church and state.

Many Religions, Many Gods

Many proponents of the religious reference in the Pledge of Allegiance describe it as a generic, non-specific religious reference that does not endorse any specific faith. They believe this avoids conflict with the First Amendment. Some religious groups in the U.S. actually want the government to play a role in religious choices, in the same way that certain groups that support censorship (another First

Amendment issue) believe it is appropriate for the government to decide what Americans can read and write.

However, the U.S. is the world's most open society regarding religion, because of its unique religious tolerance and commitment to preventing state interference. The U.S. has over 1,500 religious faiths as a result of our unique constitutional guarantees. Even a generic endorsement of a nation "under God" would alienate atheists as well as religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, that do not conceive of "God" as a single divine force.

Ninth Circuit Court Decision

Although the Supreme Court has so far skirted the issue of separation of church and state as it applies to the Pledge of Allegiance, a new legal challenge may force the court to reexamine the merits of its position. In 2002, a California man, Michael Newdow, filed a lawsuit on behalf of his nine-year-old daughter, challenging the use of the Pledge of Allegiance in the public school system. This challenge was heard in a federal court in San Francisco by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

When the court decided against the religious nature of the Pledge of Allegiance, their ruling made headlines and created controversy. The court found that the phrase "under God" was a violation of the separation of church and state as guaranteed in the Constitution. In its ruling, the Court of Appeals stated that,

A profession that we are a nation "under God" is identical ... to a profession that we are a nation "under Jesus," a nation "under Vishnu," a nation "under Zeus," or a nation "under no God," because none of these professions can be neutral with respect to religion.

The decision was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which rejected Newdow's claim based on the fact that he did not have legal custody of his daughter, while avoiding a ruling on the constitutionality of the Pledge.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court is obligated to create a strong division between religious endorsements, whatever their nature, and public institutions. Many civil liberties were violated in the 1950s as a result of anticommunist witch-hunts and unconstitutional tests of patriotism and loyalty. The religious reference in the Pledge of Allegiance is a remnant of that era that must now be abolished. The appropriate place for worship is in church, not public schools.

Ponder This

1. What is the author's main argument concerning the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in schools?
2. How has the inclusion of "under God" changed the original intent of the Pledge?
3. Was it appropriate for Congress to include the "under God" clause in 1954? Explain.
4. Discuss the Supreme Court's position on the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in schools.
5. In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of removing "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance?

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